

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 8

WASHINGTON TIMES
14 SEPTEMBER 1982

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CIA's Casey gets good marks

When Bill Casey became CIA chief and Max Hugel head of the CIA's clandestine services, critics balked at their lack of experience. Hugel quit last summer because of past doings, but Casey, after Senate examination of his business affairs, is still around.

Mr. Casey has to provide the president a coherent view of the world. To do this, CIA analysts develop truth and speculation from information sent by agents or spy-machinery. Except for a January 1981 overdramatization of weapons reaching the Salvadoran left, Mr. Casey has received good marks. There have not been repeats of such CIA *faux-pas* as election rigging in Chile, confidence in the Shah of Iran, or misperceptions of Soviet behavior toward Afghanistan. And there have been few White House, State or Defense Department complaints about CIA documents.

About all critics have of late is the Wilson-Terpil matter, an account of gun running and Libyan terrorism involving former CIA agents, which is pre-Casey stuff anyhow.

If the CIA is doing well, though, is it because of Bill Casey's leadership, or is there another, perhaps more important reason?

True, Mr. Casey's predecessors captained the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion, illegal spying of anti-war notables, excessive LSD experi-

ments. Congress had the good sense to urge them to "fess up!" Some, like Richard Helms and Bill Colby, were dragged through the fires of criticism mercilessly. But too often, CIA's critics home in on broken branches while blaming the wrong tree. For example, it was President Johnson who kept returning Vietnam assessments to the CIA to have them reflect not truth but his politics regarding the war. It was Johnson and Nixon who ordered the CIA to spy on anti-war activities in Chicago and Washington, and Nixon who suggested dirty tricks in Chile. It was Jimmy Carter's indifference to CIA capabilities that prevented tougher assessments of Iran's pre-Khomeini instability.

Presidents are much to blame, it seems, for an intelligence community's wrongdoings. Yet today's much-improved CIA performance not only results from Mr. Casey's doings, but also from a relationship that exists between him and his boss, the president.

Whether President Reagan is guiding Director Casey or allowing him the widest of parameters is of less concern than the question of presidential politicalization of Mr. Casey and the CIA. The president has demonstrated little interest in using the CIA to support foreign policy notions or political need, and that is certainly among key reasons why, today, the CIA receives better grades.

Probably the non-political president-CIA relationship is the most important managerial requirement for an effective intelligence program.

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